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ABSTRACT

This paper describes the rationale and strategies of a language teaching approach found to have been extremely effective with both adult and child learners. This approach does not require the language learner to speak until he feels comfortable doing so. Both past and current applications of a delayed oral practice approach to language learning are surveyed. Research described shows that language learners not required to speak immediately--though they may if they wish--can make more significant gains in reading, writing and speaking, as well as in listening comprehension, than students required to speak right away in a typical audio-lingual program. A variety of non-verbal response modes requiring active listening and student participation are discussed. (Author/AM)

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WHY SPEAK IF YOU DON'T NEED TO?
THE CASE FOR A LISTENING APPROACH TO BEGINNING FOREIGN LANGUAGE LEARNING

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1. INTRODUCTION

Why speak if you don't need to? In this paper I will describe the rationale and strategies of a language teaching approach found to be extremely effective with both adult and child learners which does not require the language learner to speak until he feels comfortable doing so. I will survey both past and current applications of this delayed oral practice approach to language learning. Research has shown that language learners not required to speak immediately--though they are allowed to if they wish--make more significant gains in reading, writing, and speaking as well as in listening comprehension than students required to speak right away in a typical audio-lingual approach. The period of delayed oral practice may last up to three months or longer depending on the intensity of classes and the students' readiness. It is taken as a given that many variables come into play in achieving effective language learning--including personality, attitude and motivation, language aptitude, and cognitive style. Thus the language learning strategy to be described in this paper should be looked upon as one alternative approach to second language teaching which may be particularly appropriate for certain students under certain conditions as determined by assessment of individual needs and experimental research.

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The purpose of this paper is to encourage experimentation with a delayed oral practice approach to language teaching and to suggest alternative strategies for implementation of this approach.

2. RATIONALE AND STRATEGIES FOR DELAYED ORAL PRACTICE

Active Listening

You may be asking yourself how this could be possible. How can listening training transfer to speaking, reading, and writing skills? First of all, it is important to clarify what I mean by listening. I am not speaking of listening as the process of passively hearing meaningless sounds; I am referring to active listening, a process whereby the student is actively attempting to understand and respond effectively to oral communication carefully presented in a meaningful context. Listening can thus be described as an active learning process in which the student's listening competence can be expanded by orally giving him nonverbal tasks to carry out. The student can respond nonverbally in a number of ways. For example, he can respond by pointing, nodding, or checking appropriate items on a worksheet.

The following sketches illustrate several possible approaches to teaching and assessing listening comprehension using non-verbal responses. One or all of these approaches could be utilized for purposes of instruction.

In the first approach students are required to make a pictorial-audio match. For example, students can be asked to demonstrate comprehension of commands. Students hear novel combinations of lexical items previously learned (through this approach). For each command heard, they circle the letter of a picture which illustrates the action in the

command. Thus suppose they hear the command JOHN, WALK TO THE CHAIR. In front of them they have a worksheet with pictures a-d, as in Figure 1. The students circle a letter and are given immediate feedback that (b) was the appropriate answer.

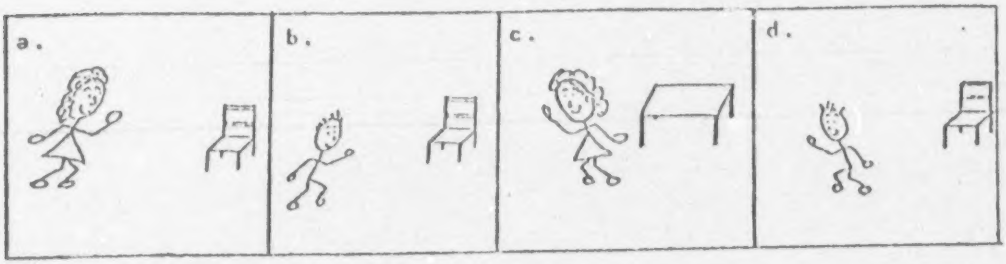

Figure 1

A second example of students making a pictorial-audio match is students demonstrating comprehension of information questions. For example, upon hearing the tape-recorded command JOHN, WALK TO THE TABLE, the students can be asked questions such as the following, which again can be novel combinations of familiar lexical items:

a. WHAT'S JOHN GOING TO WALK TO?
b. WHAT'S JOHN GOING TO DO?
c. WHO'S GOING TO WALK TO THE TABLE?

The students respond by checking the appropriate picture among a-e in Figure 2.

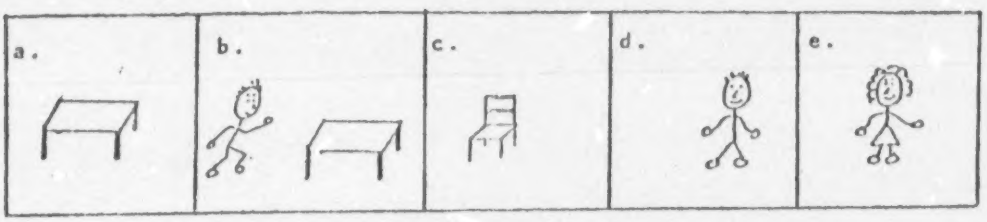

Figure 2

They are then given immediate feedback as to the correctness of their response. Of course, alternative questions such as IS JOHN GOING TO WALK TO THE CHAIR OR THE TABLE? could also be asked.

In the second approach, students are required to make a physical response-audio match. In this approach students can also be required to demonstrate comprehension of both commands and questions. E.g., upon hearing questions a, b, and c above, students called upon demonstrate their comprehension by (a) pointing to the table, or (b) walking to the table, or (c) pointing to or touching John. Or if a command such as WALK TO THE CHAIR is given, the student, having previously seen the teacher or puppet model this command along with other commands, walks to the chair (and not, e.g., to the table) if he has correctly understood the command. The teacher immediately remodels the appropriate response if he makes an error.

In the third approach, students are required to make a graphic-audio match. In this approach, students match a written response with a sentence they hear. As in the other approaches, the written responses would be familiar lexical items previously introduced through graphic-pictorial-audio matching. For example, the students may hear the sentence THE MAN'S GIVING A BLOCK TO THE BOY. Visual reinforcement would be given by including a picture of the action being talked about, as in Figure 3.

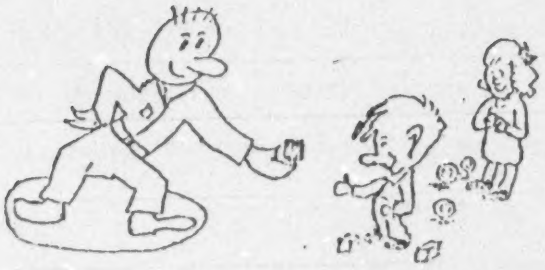

Figure 3

The students are then asked to circle one of four written responses to the questions they will hear. So for example, they could be asked the question WHO'S THE MAN GIVING THE BLOCK TO? and be given these choices of answers:

(a) the girl
(b) in the circle
(c) Yes
(d) the boy

After they have responded, they receive feedback in the form of the correct answer, (d). If (c) had been chosen, it would mean the student had mistakenly heard the WHO question as a yes-no question. If (a) or (b) had been chosen, it would mean the student had either misunderstood the information question or the preceding sentence.

We have now looked at three approaches to active listening: pictorial-audio matching, physical response-audio matching, and graphic-audio matching. One or more of these approaches can be utilized in teaching and assessing listening comprehension.

The Perception-Production Process

As well as clarifying what is meant in this paper by active listening, I would also like to discuss the nature of listening and speaking skills. As listening and speaking skills require the same

kind of language knowledge, not two different kinds of knowledge, transfer from receptive skills such as listening to productive skills such as speaking is not too surprising. Judging from current language teaching methodologies, language teaching theorists have often failed to fully grasp that exactly the same set of rules (or perhaps a subset) are used in language comprehension as in language production. I have tried to illustrate this graphically in Figure 4.

THE PERCEPTION-PRODUCTION PROCESS

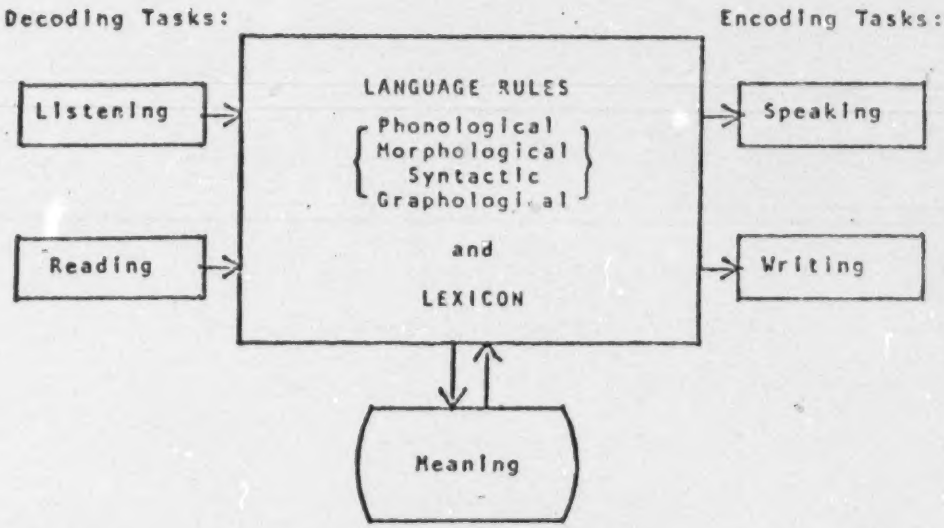

Figure 4

This simplified model shows that when we comprehend something--decoding spoken or written symbols into meaning--we arrive at the meaning by the

rules of the grammar which in normal human language relate meaning and sound sequences. Similarly, when we produce or encode a meaning, as in speaking or writing, we do so by utilizing the same phonological, syntactic, and semantic rules that we used in decoding. The only substantial difference between encoding and decoding is the motor skills required for the encoding process, be it writing, speech, or sign language. The rules are the same. Any instructional methodology which teaches these rules will of necessity have effects on the total language competence. The question then is which methodology teaches these rules most efficiently.

Arguments for Delaying Speaking

If the same rules underlie speaking and listening, why not work on speaking first and listening later? The obvious answer is that you can't say what you don't know. That is, you have to understand how a language works--how to apply its rules--before you can create a sentence in it.

We then come to the crucial question. Why not teach listening comprehension and speaking together, as in the typical audio-lingual approach? Why teach listening comprehension first and worry about speaking later? There are several strong arguments for teaching listening first for an extended period of time. These arguments are related both to the affective and cognitive dimensions of language acquisition.

From an affective point of view, perceptual and psychological readiness for speaking is extremely important for effective speech behavior. Both first and second language students--adults and children--generally prefer not to speak a language whose rules and meaning they

have only imperfectly perceived, let alone internalized (see, e.g., Ervin-Tripp, 1974; Sorenson, 1967). How can students most efficiently internalize knowledge of the language? One thing we know with respect to the cognitive dimension of language learning is that oral mimickry and memorization of sentences others say to us does not play a major role in language learning. Miller et. al. (1960:146) have stated that language learning by stimulus-response conditioning would require an uninterrupted childhood 100 years long with perfect retention for every twenty word string heard only once! The fact that the child can both construct and understand an infinite number of sentences which are new to him, yet grammatically acceptable in his language, cannot be accounted for by an S-R view of language learning, as argued by Slovin (1971), Bellugi (1970), Slobin and Welsh (1968), Ervin (1964), Chomsky (1959, 1964, 1965, 1966, 1972), Carroll (1963), and others. There is no reason to assume that first and second language learning are not alike in this respect.

Note that a normal child learning his first language appears to demonstrate comprehension of sentences at least 6 months prior to his demonstrating readiness for speaking (Lenneberg, 1967). That is, the child does not start speaking the moment he starts comprehending. In fact, one doesn't ever have to speak in order to acquire language competence--i.e., in order to utilize for communicative purposes the rule system of the language--as seen in Lenneberg "Understanding Language Without Ability to Speak: A Case Report" (1962). Furthermore, second language learning research has shown that having to immediately practice speaking while trying to develop listening comprehension interferes with the student's learning, disrupting the association process necessary

for integration and recall of the language. It also provides learners with incorrect models of speech.

How then might we summarize the main advantages of a delayed oral practice to language learning? I would summarize them as follows: (1) the cognitive advantage, (2) the affective advantage, (3) the efficiency advantage, and (4) the utility advantage.

With respect to (1), the cognitive advantage, there is strong empirical evidence that having to simultaneously focus on speaking performance as well as on listening comprehension distracts the learner from his main objective of understanding the language system underlying what he is hearing. Postovsky (1975) points out that requiring learners to produce material they have not yet stored in their memory will lead to language interference and overload of short-term memory. Experimental studies support his premise, showing a high degree of transfer between a listening-only focus and other language skills--with lower scores in the 4 language skills reported when students were required to develop speaking and listening skills simultaneously.

With respect to (2), the affective advantage, for many learners, particularly older children and adults, an attempt to immediately produce sentences in front of others is very stressful and embarrassing and reduces the learner's concentration and effectiveness in language learning.

With respect to (3), the efficiency advantage, it is an accepted though not always acted upon fact that in second language learning as in first language learning, there is a considerable lag between the development of one's receptive competence and one's productive competence. One can learn a language much more efficiently if one does not have to

worry about producing all the language data one is exposed to. In other words, the learner can be exposed to much more of the target language in much less time if he is not required to verbally retrieve it. Ingram, Nord, and Dragt (1974:7) have found "that the range of foreign language aptitude is not nearly so divergent in listening comprehension as in oral responses." That is, when required to perform nonverbally, the lower aptitude students overperform. They apparently absorb language much faster and more efficiently when not required to speak.

With respect to (4), the utility advantage, it is often the case that the receptive skills--listening comprehension and reading--are more needed by the foreign language learner than productive skills. Ingram, Nord, and Dragt (1974) have pointed out that even in conversation the need for listening skills far exceeds the need for speaking skills. One can speak using a very restricted subset of familiar language structures, but he can't force the other speaker to use only language which he knows. Furthermore, language learners who have been taught to capitalize on the advantages of a receptive approach to language learning can easily and skillfully continue their language study alone, independently of a particular language program. This can be carried out, for example, by listening to the radio, watching films and TV, and reading.

We have now discussed the four main advantages of a delayed oral practice approach to language learning: They are the cognitive advantage, the affective advantage, the efficiency advantage, and the utility advantage.

Assumptions Underlying Delaying Speaking

What are the assumptions underlying a delayed speaking approach to language learning? These assumptions include at least the following:

1. Language is not speech. It is a set of principles establishing correlations between meaning and sound sequences or other overt forms of communicative language such as sign language.

2. Learning a first or second language does not occur through habit formation. Rather it occurs by an inductive-deductive process whereby the learner starts with a general theory of grammar and given the linguistic data of a particular language, he constructs and applies rules based on this grammar.

3. The development of receptive skills are necessary for the development of productive skills. I.e. speaking is a result, not a cause of language learning, and therefore should be postponed at least in the early stages of language learning.

4. Effective listening comprehension training must be meaningful, challenging, require overt learner response, and provide immediate feedback to the learner as to the correctness of his response.

3. PAST AND PRESENT APPLICATIONS OF DELAYED ORAL PRACTICE

Having discussed some assumptions and advantages of delayed oral practice, let us now look at empirical evidence supporting such an approach. We will discuss some past and on-going research concerned with the effect of delayed oral practice on language learning. Much of this research has been concerned with adult second language learning--though some of it is concerned with children. Some of the experiments have been extremely carefully controlled; in other looser classroom studies, this was not possible. In some cases the mode of response during listening training was gross motor movements such as pointing or running;

in other cases it was writing or simply checking off appropriate picture or writing responses on a worksheet. In some cases students had massed intensive practice; in other cases it was not intensive but was distributed over a fairly long period of time. Such variables must be considered when determining the implications of particular experimental results. Let us begin by looking at some adult studies.

Adult Language Learning

In two extensive and extremely well-controlled 12 week studies of adults learning Russian at the Defense Language Institute, Presidio of Monterey, Postovsky (1970) compared a delayed oral practice approach with an audio-lingual approach to second language learning where students were required to mimic what they heard from the first day on. The non-verbal response mode for the experimental subjects was writing.

Postovsky argues that in an intensive 6 hour a day program, listening training requiring writing responses is more efficient than listening training requiring gross motor movements. Introducing the writing system also provides a vehicle for assigning 2 to 3 hours of homework a night. A significant problem of graphic interference is not created by introducing the Cyrillic alphabet, apparently because of the fairly regular correspondences between Russian orthography and phonology. Postovsky's experiment was designed to test the effect of delayed oral practice on the productive skills of speaking and writing as well as on the receptive skills of listening and reading. The experimental subjects made a transition to speaking after 4 weeks, 120 hours of instruction. Test measures of all four language skills favored the experimental group over the control group both at the end of 6 and 12 weeks. At six weeks the most significant differences favoring the experimental

group were in speaking, reading, and writing, and at 12 weeks differences significantly favoring the experimental group were in listening comprehension.

In a recent unpublished evaluation of another ongoing intensive program for teaching Russian at the Defense Language Institute, Postovsky (1976) reports that Experimental Subjects had oral practice delayed for 7 weeks--240 hours-- while Control Subjects started speaking from the beginning in an audio-lingual approach. The non-verbal or training responses are writing or selecting the appropriate choice of several written or pictorial responses. The experimental group's language training has included classroom exercises, a language lab component, and an audio-visual TV component based on Winitz (1973) language teaching model in which language material and pictorial events are represented simultaneously. Up to four pictures can be projected on the TV screen, forcing the student to select between several alternatives in making a direct sound-symbol association. A large variety of grammatical structure can be introduced in this approach.

After 14 weeks, the experimental group showed significantly superior performance on the Russian Level I Proficiency Test in both comprehension and speaking. While his test results favor a delayed oral practice approach to language learning, Postovsky concludes that the test results must only be interpreted as indicative of a general trend favoring delayed oral practice, due to the looseness of certain experimental controls.

Another adult program emphasizing the use of listening comprehension for teaching language skills has recently been conducted at Michigan State University; this program also taught Russian. The

experimenters, Ingram, Nord, and Dragt (1974), indicate that oral practice was delayed throughout the entire program. The program consisted of 9 contact hours per week over 3 terms (30 weeks). The 20 students utilized Asher's Total Physical Response Technique--responding non-verbally with physical movements--the first 3 weeks of instruction. Their following classes emphasized language lab work that tested comprehension of every utterance through worksheets and gave immediate feedback as to correctness. Among the major conclusions of this project was that "a continuing focus on listening for comprehension of newly introduced materials is readily transferred to other language skills, especially speaking." It was also concluded that "when task overload is minimized, a much higher degree of student motivation is manifested in the form of reduced attrition and extended student perseverance" (13).

Asher, the San Jose State University proponent of the Total Physical Response Technique (TPRT), has also experimented with delaying oral practice in both adult and child language learning. However, in Asher's approach, delayed oral practice and a physical response mode are two inextricable--i.e., obligatory--parts. In the Total Physical Response Technique, as described by Asher, students listen to a command in a foreign language such as ' RUN TO THE TABLE and then respond immediately together with the instructor with the appropriate physical action. Asher's work has demonstrated that listening comprehension of both adults and children can be accelerated through delayed oral practice and physical response training, and that there can be positive transfer from this approach to other language skills. Some of his major findings are as follows:

In a brief lab experiment, Asher (1969) reported that adults learning Russian through the TPRT had significantly better skill in listening comprehension than adults who simultanously repeated and acted out the commands. Other brief lab experiments by Asher (1969) have shown that adult students learning samples of Russian or Japanese who acted or observed in training and acted individually in retention tests had significantly better retention than students who acted or observed during training but were required to translate into English the target language commands during the retention test.

In a less rigorous 32 hour classroom study of adults learning German through the TPRT, with speaking delayed about 16 hours, Asher (1972) reports that college students learning through the TPRT achieved significantly better listening comprehension results compared with students who had either 75 or 150 hours of regular college instruction in German. However, these results may not seem too surprising when we are told that the Control Groups' courses focused on reading and writing training. That is, we would expect that a program focussing on listening training would result in better listening comprehension than a program that did not. What is interesting, however, is that Asher's students' reading performance did not significantly differ from those students in the reading-oriented class who had more than twice as many hours of training.

Transfer from the Total Physical Response Technique to reading can also be seen in the results of application of the Flemming Reading Test, developed by a San Jose State University graduate student (Flemming, 1973) and given at the end of one year of training to adult ESL students who had been placed in one of four levels by a routine placement test at

the San Jose Metropolitan Adult Education Center. Beginning students used the Total Physical Response Technique, delaying speaking until after about 12 hours of classes. After 120 hours of training, they performed as well in reading proficiency as audio-lingually trained higher level students who had received as many as 240 hours of study. Asher's approach thus cut needed classroom time in half.

Asher, Kusudo, and de la Torre (1974) in a 90 hour classroom study of adults learning Spanish through the TPRT have also found a high level of listening comprehension and transfer from listening to other skills. It was reported that after 45 hours of training, the experimental subjects had significantly higher listening comprehension and reading scores than college students who had had about 75 hours of conventional instruction. Compared with students who had had 150 hours of conventional training in Spanish, the experimental subjects had significantly higher listening comprehension scores, and there was no significant difference in reading skills between the groups. Unfortunately, writing and speaking tests appeared not to have been made. However, the time saved by learning listening comprehension and reading through Asher's approach was phenomenal in this study.

The Total Physical Response Technique has also been found effective for teaching adults sign language. Students respond to questions and commands made in sign language but are not required to produce them in early stages of sign language learning. This is yet another interesting example of receptive language being shown to have priority over productive language in language teaching.

Child Language Learning

What about experimental studies of children learning a foreign language through an extended period of delayed oral practice? As described above, there have been a number of long term research studies of adults learning through delayed oral practice and some form of non-verbal response. However, the fact that no such experimentation had been done with children and that even most of the adult studies had not tested the effects of delayed oral practice on speaking ability prompted my 1972 study (Gary 1974, 1975).

The main purpose of this investigation, conducted over a five month period, was to determine in an elementary school setting the effects on children's listening comprehension and speaking skills of delayed oral practice and a physical response mode in beginning stages of learning Spanish as a foreign language. The subjects consisted of 50 lower elementary school children randomly distributed between experimental and control groups. To control the content and teacher variables, the students were taught the same language structures by the same teacher 25 minutes a day. However, the experimental group participated in a 14 week period of totally delayed oral practice, which--after a brief transition period--was followed by a 7 week phase of partially delayed oral practice. Speaking during this latter period was not required until the second half of each daily lesson. A typical audio-lingual format required the control group to speak from the first day of the experiment.

Statistically significant test results in listening comprehension were found to favor the experimental group over the control group. While this was not the case in speaking, ability, results of individual

tests given at the completion of the experiment were shown to favor the experimental group. A further interesting fact was that while the control subjects' test scores had decreased between experiment Mid and Final individual tests, experimental subjects' test scores had increased. This suggests that had the language program been longer than five months, the experimental group's test scores might have more dramatically exceeded that of the control groups.

I am aware of no other studies which have been done of the effect on children's speaking ability of a delayed oral practice approach to second language teaching. Further experimentation on this interesting possibility remains to be done. Carroll (1973) has suggested that a delayed oral practice or extended listening approach to language learning may have promising possibilities at the intermediate or plateau stage of language learning as well as at beginning stages of foreign language learning.

Have any other studies been recently done of the effects of delayed oral practice on children's language skills other than on speaking?

In a recent unpublished paper Asher (1976) has described a series of informal, loosely controlled classroom studies of children in 1st, 2nd, and 5th through 9th grades learning Spanish with a delayed oral practice and physical response approach in 3 twenty-minute classes a week for a year. Some general conclusions were that listening comprehension was substantially accelerated by a delayed oral practice and physical response approach, and there was a high degree of transfer of learning to reading and writing. Speaking was not tested.

4. QUESTIONS YET TO EXPLORE

What are the implications for the classroom teacher of the promising possibilities of a delayed oral practice approach to language teaching? As we have observed, there remains an infinite variety of interesting possibilities to be explored with respect to this approach. There are many questions yet unresolved with respect to its optimal effectiveness. Some of the interesting questions remaining to be explored are:

1. In a delayed oral practice approach, what mode of non-verbal response is most appropriate for what age group? Several possible modes of response have been discussed, and illustrated in this paper They include gross motor physical responses and writing responses. Perhaps a combination of these response modes would be more effective than simply utilizing one of them.

2. For particular age groups and learning styles, what is the most appropriate amount of extended listening practice before requiring speaking? Language teaching projects have differed greatly to date with respect to this variable. In the Michigan Russian program described in this paper, speaking was never required. At the Defense Language Institute, students currently learning Russian are not required to speak for the first 7 weeks or 240 hours. In the following 180 hours (6 weeks) of their program, students are only required to speak 1 out of 6 daily class hours; in the final 24 weeks, they are required to speak 2 out of 6 daily class hours. Asher's subjects, on the other hand, generally start speaking after 12 to 16 hours of instruction. As Postovsky has reported a high degree of transfer to speaking, reading, and writing skills when oral practice is delayed for a much more extended

period of time, one might consider experimenting with fairly long periods of delayed oral practice.

That such a long period of delayed oral practice can be effectively utilized by elementary school children as well as adults can be seen, e.g., in Navajo and Spanish-speaking children's English kindergarten curriculum, developed by Consultants in Total Education of Los Angeles, where children are not required to speak English during the entire school day for 3 months. Unfortunately, no test results are available with respect to the specific effects of delayed oral practice as isolated from the other variables affecting these children's learning. However, the fact that numerous lower elementary school children utilizing these materials for a number of years in Arizona, New Mexico, and California have functioned happily and successfully within the demands of their total school setting seems to support the efficacy of delaying oral practice in child language learning. We have already noted my experiment (Gary, 1974, 1975) in which lower elementary school children not required to speak Spanish for 7 weeks functioned happily and effectively. At first not even aware they were not speaking, the children inquired how they differed from the other (speaking) group.

3. How can this approach be optimally used to individualize instruction? A delayed oral practice approach lends itself to infinite possibilities for individualization of instruction, utilizing tape recordings, filmstrips, movies, videocassettes, radio, TV, computer assisted instruction and other valuable teacher supplements. It offers a new lease of life to the language lab. Slower learners, given worksheets to fill out in the language lab, can replay the appropriate selections as many times as is necessary for developing adequate

immediate feedback about his responses. One imaginative way used by Ingram, Nord, and Dragt is called a latent image response. The correctness of student responses--either in the form of choices or writing responses--is immediately confirmed by the student applying a special chemical with a felt-tipped pen which causes the correct response to appear on the paper.

4. Finally, more experimentation is needed on the transfer of learning hypothesis, again with different age groups and learning styles. What combinations of delayed oral practice and types of response modes can most effectively lead to transfer of learning from listening comprehension to speaking, reading, and writing, and hence to enormous savings in classroom time and energy?

I conclude with these questions and hope that this paper will encourage further research into the numerous possibilities of a delayed oral practice approach to language learning

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